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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA: HOLOCAUST EDUCATION MANDATORY BUT NEEDS
IMPROVEMENT

REF: SECSTATE 348370

1. IN RESPONSE TO REFTEL QUESTIONS CONCERNING HOLOCAUST
EDUCATION IN SLOVAKIA, POST OFFERS THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION
DRAWN FROM THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE 1998 REPORT ON "THE
TREATMENT OF JEWISH THEMES IN SLOVAK SCHOOLS" AND FROM DISCUSSION
IN EARLY JANUARY 2004 WITH MRS. MARIA SLUGENOVA AT THE MINISTRY
OF EDUCATION AND MR. EGON GAL, DIRECTOR OF THE JEWISH STUDIES
PROGRAM AT COMENIUS UNIVERSITY. BOTH INDIVIDUALS ARE MEMBERS OF
SLOVAKIA'S COMMITTEE THAT COORDINATES WITH THE TASK FORCE FOR
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN HOLOCAUST EDUCATION, REMEMBRANCE AND
RESEARCH. IN BRIEF, SLOVAKIA HAS EDUCATION LEADERS ACTIVELY
ENGAGED IN TRYING TO IMPROVE HOLOCAUST EDUCATION; HOWEVER, THERE
IS STILL SOME WAY TO GO AS THE TOPIC DOES NOT HAVE AN OFFICIAL
CURRICULUM OR IN-DEPTH TEXTS.

2. IS THERE A NATIONAL REQUIREMENT FOR TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST?

A: YES. SLOVAKIA HAS A NATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM AND
INFORMATION ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST IS INCLUDED IN SOME REQUIRED
TEXTBOOKS FOR ELEMENTARY AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS. REQUIRED
TEXTS TOUCHING ON JEWISH HISTORY AND THE HOLOCAUST INCLUDE
HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY BOOKS, AS WELL AS CIVIC EDUCATION. SOME
NEWLY-PUBLISHED REQUIRED TEXTS AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL ARE CANDID
ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE WARTIME SLOVAK STATE IN THE PERSECUTION AND
DEPORTATION TO CONCENTRATION CAMPS OF MANY THOUSANDS OF SLOVAK
JEWS. SECONDARY SCHOOL BOOKS, STILL IN USE UNTIL A NEWLY-
PREPARED HIGH SCHOOL BOOK REACHES THE PRESS, PRESENT THE WARTIME
SLOVAK STATE POSITIVELY, COVERING UP COMPLICITY WITH THE
HOLOCAUST, IN LINE WITH NATIONALIST TRENDS IN POLITICS. BOTH THE
PRESIDENT AND THE PRIME MINISTER ARE SUPPORTIVE OF HOLOCAUST
EDUCATION AS A NATIONAL REQUIREMENT, AND REFORM OF BOOKS AS WELL
AS TEACHER TRAINING ARE ONGOING. SEPTEMBER 9 IS RECOGNIZED IN
SLOVAKIA AS A DAY OF REMEMBRANCE FOR THE HOLOCAUST. SCHOOLS
ORGANIZE DISCUSSIONS AND TEACHERS AND STUDENTS VISIT MEMORIAL
SITES IN THEIR REGIONS. THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE, POLITICAL
PARTIES, THE JEWISH MUSEUM, SOME NGOS AND OTHERS ALSO ORGANIZE
EVENTS.

3. ARE THERE STATE OR MUNICIPAL REQUIREMENTS OR GUIDELINES FOR
TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST?

A: AS THE CURRICULUM IS NATIONAL, THE APPROACH IS NATIONAL FOR
THIS COUNTRY WITH A TOTAL POPULATION OF AROUND FIVE MILLION. THE
COUNTRY'S FOUR TEACHERS' TRAINING COLLEGES IN KOSICE, PRESOV,
BANSKA BYSTRICA AND BRATISLAVA THAT COORDINATE IN-SERVICE AS WELL
AS PRE-SERVICE TRAINING DO INCLUDE VOLUNTARY PROGRAMS ON
HOLOCAUST TRAINING THAT ARE WELL ATTENDED. TRAINERS DESCRIBE
THE TEACHERS AS MOTIVATED AND OPEN-MINDED CONCERNING HOLOCAUST
HISTORY. TRAINING OF TRAINERS IS ONGOING IN SLOVAKIA AND ABOUT
FIFTY TEACHER TRAINERS ARE NOW AVAILABLE IN THE FIELD. THEIR
TRAINING HAS INCLUDED SITE VISITS TO FORMER CONCENTRATION CAMPS.

4. WHAT CURRICULA HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATION?

A: THERE IS NO SPECIFIC CURRICULUM FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATION;
HOWEVER AN EDUCATION PACKET IS IN PREPARATION (SEE BELOW).

5. HOW ARE THE TEXT MATERIALS ON THE HOLOCAUST BEING USED IN
SCHOOLS?

A: CURRENT TEXTS ON THE HOLOCAUST ARE INSUFFICIENT AND TEACHERS
ARE WAITING FOR THE NEW HIGH SCHOOL HISTORY TEXTBOOK. OF SPECIAL
INTEREST, A HOLOCAUST EDUCATION PACKET FOR TEACHERS PREPARED BY
HISTORIANS, SPECIALISTS AND TEACHERS IS THE FIRST SYSTEMATIC
MATERIAL THAT TEACHERS WILL RECEIVE DEALING WITH HOLOCAUST
EDUCATION FOR SLOVAKIA. THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION IN COOPERATION
WITH THE INSTITUTE OF JEWISH STUDIES HAS COMPLETED PREPARATION OF
THE PACKET AND ONE THOUSAND COPIES WILL BE DISTRIBUTED IN THE
SPRING. THE PACKAGE WILL BE USED AS SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL BY
HISTORY TEACHERS. IT INCLUDES "GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING ABOUT THE
HOLOCAUST," AS WELL AS "ROOTS, CONDITIONS AND THE COURSE OF THE
HOLOCAUST IN EUROPE AND SLOVAKIA". IT ALSO INCLUDES BACKGROUND
INFORMATION ABOUT THE JEWISH PEOPLE. THE PACKAGE HAS A VIDEOTAPE
OF AUTHENTIC TESTIMONY OF SLOVAK SURVIVORS AND A THEMATIC
WORKBOOK. AT PRESENT, USE OF SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS AND CORRECT
USE OF REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS LEAVES HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN LARGE
PART TO THE TEACHERS' DISCRETION. OUR CONTACTS DO REPORT THAT
MANY TEACHERS ARE ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN HOLOCAUST EDUCATION AT
PRESENT.

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